

BOATING SAFETY BRIEF

LOSSES

Navy and Marine Corps losses involving boating for FY91 through 95 include 24 fatalities. Deaths are mostly from drowning.

BACKGROUND

A review of boating mishaps shows a variety of factors are involved in the typical mishap. Improper weight distribution, overloading, inattention to weather conditions and improper lookout are the chief causes of collisions. Hanging over the side and riding on the bow, combined with unexpected turns, lead to falls overboard. Alcohol and boating accidents go hand in hand. Alcohol lessens the alertness and sense of balance that are crucial to accident-free boating. This can occur with as little as one or two drinks. The U.S. Coast Guard reports alcohol involvement in over 50 percent of all serious boating accidents.

EXAMPLES

The following examples are typical boating mishap reports received at the Naval Safety Center:

a. DK2 and AT3 were participating in a Navy sponsored white water rafting trip down a river. They were two of eight people, including the guide, riding in the second of three rafts. On the run down, raft 1 cleared a log that was stuck partially across the river. The guide in raft 2 said she saw the log and maneuvered to keep clear of it but got pushed too far right in the river and got pushed into the log. After striking the log, the raft rolled, dumping all eight paddlers into the river. AT3 and DK2 and AO3 got swept under and pinned beneath the log. The other members ended up on the shore or sandbar. AO3 survived by braking some branches and swimming to safety. AT3 and DK2 drowned. Prior to participating in any activity one has to apply risk assessment and risk management steps.

Identify hazards such as fast running water, debris, and cold water. Assess risks. Is the fast running water very risky, debris extremely risky and cold water moderately risky? Make risk decisions and implement controls. Scout the area for fast running water, select a different route for debris and wear a wet suit for cold water. Monitor situation if changes occur make the necessary adjustments.

b. SN was returning at night in his privately owned a 14 feet fiberglass outboard boat. He collided with another boat. His passenger sustained a dislocated hip. SN was thrown out of the boat and he was not found until the next morning. Both boats were operated without lights. Personal flotation devices were available but not worn. SN had no formal boating courses and had been drinking beer prior to the mishap. BAC was not available. SN drowned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations include the following:

a. Take a safe boating course. The local MWR department can provide the information necessary to enroll.

b. Do a pre-season inspection of your boat, motor, and safety accessories and check them each time you go out.

c. Install a dead-main ignition switch on your motor.

d. Abide by the manufacturer's load capacity plate on the boat. It lists limits for people, motor and gear. Don't overload.

e. Make sure the required safety equipment (i.e., personal flotation devices, fire extinguisher, whistle, horn, flares, etc.) is aboard the boat. Remember boats 16 feet and longer are required to carry three

daytime and three night time visual distress devices.

f. A VHF radio is recommended as well as an anchor and line.

g. Always leave a float plan with a friend or marina operator. Indicate where you are going, departure time, boat name, registration number, and what time to notify the Coast Guard if you have not returned.

h. Check weather conditions before you leave and immediately return home if the weather turns sour. Don't wait for the waves to come over the bow.

i. Ensure everyone wears an approved Coast Guard personal flotation device while underway on an MWR rented boat, smaller than 16 feet per OPNAVINST, 5100.25A. Additionally, this practice is highly recommended for all boats. Boats 16 feet and longer are required to be equipped with one Type I, II, III, or V (wearable) device for each person aboard plus one Type IV (cushion or life ring). Boats less than 16 feet in length are required to carry one Type I, II, III, IV or V for each person aboard.

j. Discourage alcohol use. Most states have stiff penalties, similar to those imposed on motor vehicles operators, for operating a boat while intoxicated.

k. When passing marinas, fishing areas, or swimming areas reduce speed to prevent wakes.

SOURCES:

U.S. Coast Guard
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And Consumer Affairs
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